Pat Nixon Bristles At Watergate Questions

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WASHINGTON (AP) — It was to be for Pat Nixon a pleasant occasion, "A Day in the Country," as the congressional and Cabinet wives called their annual Congressional Club luncheon for the first lady.

But as so often happens these days in Washington, the subject of Watergate came up. And Mrs. Nixon bristled.

"Yes," she said tersely when asked if she has read the edited transcripts of her husband's Watergate conversations. "I did. It takes 9 to 12 hours. You can't just read excerpts."

Then she turned to the reporter questioning her during the luncheon at the Shoreham Americana Hotel and asked if she had read the entire volume.

"Only about 300 pages," came the reply.

"When you've read it all come back," Mrs. Nixon said, turning away.

To another reporter who asked the first lady for a reaction to the edited transcripts, Mrs. Nixon snapped, "Now look, this isn't a press conference. This is a party. If you want, ask the people here who have worked so hard on all of this so it will get in the newspapers."

Then she turned to the chairman of the luncheon, Mrs. Ruth Thone, who was trying to shield Mrs. Nixon from reporters' questions, and said, "I don't think it's fair to take the limelight away from all those who have worked so hard."

Later, Mrs. Nixon made a veiled reference to her husband's Watergate troubles when she said to the more than 1,000 women who gave her two standing ovations, "You're my best friends. Your words, like in 'I love you,' 'we support you,' they cheer me up. These are the things that give you the chance to fight for what's right. And that's what we're doing."

"It's a difficult time for her," said Helen Smith, Mrs. Nixon's press secretary. "She says she doesn't want to talk about these things because she wants to focus on the positive." Mrs. Smith said she does not think the first lady has listened to the actual tapes from which the transcripts were made.

It hurt Mrs. Nixon to see her daughter Julie and her husband David Eisenhower hold a press conference May 11 to defend her father's innocence in the Watergate scandal, Mrs. Smith said.